



## Be TT-funded Bat & Chat session growing fast

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**Posted On:** May 24, 2019

A Bat & Chat session funded by the Be TT programme is bringing older people together and helping a club to forge new community connections and bring in new members.

The sessions at Culcheth Sports Club came about after a meeting earlier this year with members of the Warrington Table Tennis League, who wanted to enable more people to play table tennis and to help sustain participation within the league.

It was decided to set up a daytime activity which would be supported and delivered by Warrington Table Tennis Club and a facility was identified at Culcheth Sports Club for a new Bat & Chat session.

Be TT funding helped to produce flyers and posters to promote the sessions locally, and new tables were ordered to add to the two tables already at the facility, along with bats and balls. The session was to be delivered by George Lennon, the head coach from Warrington TTC.

The new session began on a Friday afternoon in February from 1pm–3pm, with around eight participants attending the very first session. The sessions continued to be promoted within the local shops and in the sports club, which has more than 100 members and within a month of the first session, a regular cohort of 16–20 participants had developed. Warrington TTC also decided to move from their existing club venue at Lowton Secondary School to Culcheth Sports Club.

The participants were a 50/50 breakdown of male and female and included some who had suffered ill health, including Parkinson's Disease and a stroke.

Husband and wife Joe and Jan, aged 64 and 64, were among those to see the adverts and to go along to the sessions. They said: "We saw the advert in the local shops and phoned George who told us to just come along. We used to play on holidays, we've been married 40 years and still play on holiday.

"When we saw it advertised, we thought great, we can go and play it! We love playing it and can't wait for the next week. We even talk about it during the week and love everything about it – the physical exercise, mental

challenge. We feel fitter, have lost weight, it's fun and sociable which is a great asset for the sport."

Jean, whose husband Brian has Parkinson's, said: "I play on a Thursday here with three other ladies, but they are much better than me. I come along to try and improve my skills and my husband Brian has Parkinson's, so it's great that we can both come along together because it is good for Brian as well.

"It's a nice sociable group where we are getting to know each other and are making new friends. I enjoy receiving the coaching tips and advice from George to help improve my standard."

Culcheth Sports Club member Harry, aged 78, added: "I was bringing along a friend to play snooker when I saw the table tennis taking place. I used to play as a teenager at work within a printing company and so I wanted to play again.

"I enjoy the games with different players and styles of play. Everybody is forgiving of everybody's abilities. It's about having fun and enjoying yourself. It's hard to play with league players as they are too good for me but this enables me to compete and the social side attracts me."

Head coach George said: "As I had run a Bat & Chat in the club where I coached previously, I was aware of the popularity of these sessions, but as Warrington Table Tennis Club was located in a school, we were unable to offer daytime table tennis, which is a must for Bat & Chat groups.

"I was therefore keen to take up the opportunity of Table Tennis England support and set up a new group in a sports club location.

"The result has truly not just surprised me, but inspired me. In just four months we have 30 Bat & Chat members, with 15 to 20 attending each session. As a full-time coach, I thought I knew exactly what to expect, but I've been happily taken aback. The first week I arrived with tea, coffee and biscuits for the chat breaks, to be told in the chat, we'd rather just continue to play table tennis!

"There is chat, as one would expect with the average age of 60 plus, but it takes place during play. We have a fantastic mix of male, female and a wide range of medical conditions but every single one of them not only want to learn to play table tennis, they love it.

"They are competitive, determined, give 100% effort, support each other and in the process, keep active, make new friends and have fun. It is a pleasure to coach such a lovely group of people who each week look forward to their Bat & Chat. I can't wait to introduce them to the new pairs league which will be starting soon."

The project was set up through some funding from the Be TT programme and now that the participants are paying £4 per session, the session will be sustainable for George to continue to run. He will be there to provide coaching tips for those that want them and if some want to progress to playing in the new pairs league, Warrington TTC will be there to support them.

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